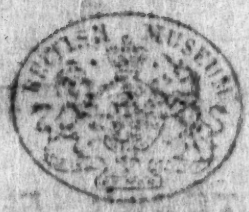
A

SERMON

PREACHED

At St. MATTHEW's, *Bethnal-Green*,

On SUNDAY, Nov. 12, 1775.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A

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At St. MATTHEW's, *Bethnal-Green*,

On SUNDAY, Nov. 12, 1775.

By *JOHN WESLEY*, M. A.

1st Edition

For the Benefit of the Widows and Orphans of the Soldiers who lately fell, near *Boston* in *New-England*.

LONDON:

Printed by R. HAWES, (No. 40.) the Corner of *Dorset-Street*, Crispin-Street, Spitalfields.

[*Price* SIX-PENCE.]

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2 SAM. xxiv. 17.

Lo, I have ſinned, and I have done wickedly: but theſe ſheep, what have they done?

1. THE chapter begins, *And again the anger of the Lord was kindled againſt Iſrael, and he moved David againſt them, to ſay, Go number Iſrael and Judah. Again*—It had been kindled againſt them but a few years before; in conſequence of which *there had been a famine in the land, three years*, year after year, Chap. xxi. 1. till *David enquired of the Lord*, and was taught the way of appeaſing it. We

are

are not informed, in what particular manner Israel had now offended God: by what particular cause his anger was kindled, but barely with the effect. *He moved David against them* to say, *Go, number Israel and Judah.* *He*—Not God! Beware how you impute this to the Fountain of Love and Holiness! It was not God, but Satan who thus moved David. So the parallel scripture expressly declares. *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.* 1 Chron. xxi. 1. *Satan stood* before God, to accuse David and Israel, and to beg God's permission to tempt David. *Standing* is properly the accuser's posture before the tribunals of men. And therefore the scripture, which uses to speak of the things of God

God after the manner of men, repre-
ſents Satan as appearing in this poſture
before the tribunal of God. *And*
David ſaid to Joab, and to the rulers of
the people, Go, number Iſrael from
Beerſheba even to Dan; and bring the
number of them to me, that I may
know it. ver. 2.

2. It does not clearly appear wherein the ſin of thus numbering the people conſiſted. There is no expreſs prohibition of it, in any of the Scriptures which were then extant. Yet we read, *The king's word was abominable to Joab,* ver. 6. who was not a man of the tenderest conſcience, ſo that he expoſtulated with David before he obeyed. *Joab anſwered, Why doth my lord require this*

thing?

thing? *Why will he be a cauſe of treſpaſs*—of puniſhment or calamity —*to Iſrael?* God frequently puniſhes a people for the ſins of their rulers; becauſe they are generally partakers of their ſins, in one kind or other. And the righteous Judge takes this occaſion of puniſhing them for all their ſins. In this, Joab was right; for after they were numbered, it is ſaid, *And God was diſpleaſed with this thing.* Yea, *David's heart ſmote him, and he ſaid unto the Lord, I have ſinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beſeech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy ſervant.* 2 Sam. xxiv. 10. Did not the ſin lie in the motive on which the thing was done? Did he not do it in the

pride

pride of his heart? Probably out of a principle of vanity and oſtentation: glorying not in God, but in the number of his people.

3. In the ſequel we find, that even Joab was for once a true prophet: *David* was *a cauſe of treſpaſs*, of puniſhment, *to Iſrael.* His ſin, added to all the ſins of the people, filled up the meaſure of their iniquities. So *the Lord ſent a peſtilence upon Iſrael, from the morning*, wherein Gad the prophet gave David his choice, of war, famine, or peſtilence, *unto the evening of the third day. And there died of the people from Dan, unto Beerſheba ſeventy thouſand men.* v. 15. *And when David ſaw the angel that ſmote the people*, who appeared in the form

form of a man, with a drawn ſword in his hand, to convince him the more fully, that this plague was immediately from God, *he ſaid, Lo, I have ſinned, I have done wickedly: but theſe ſheep, what have they done?*

4. Is there not, in ſeveral reſpects, a remarkable reſemblance between the caſe of Iſrael and our own?—General wickedneſs then occaſioned a general viſitation: and does not the ſame cauſe now produce the ſame effect? We likewiſe have ſinned, and we are puniſhed: and perhaps theſe are only the beginning of ſorrows. Perhaps *the angel* is now *ſtretching out his hand over* ENGLAND to deſtroy it. O that *the Lord* would at length ſay to him that deſtroyeth, *It is enough: ſtay now thine hand!*

5. That

5. That vice is the parent of misery, few deny; it is confirmed by the general ſuffrage of all ages. But we ſeldom bring this home to ourſelves: when we ſpeak of ſin as the cauſe of miſery, we uſually mean, the ſin of other people, and ſuppoſe *we* ſuffer, becauſe *they* ſin. But need we go ſo far? Are not our own vices ſufficient to account for all our ſufferings? Let us fairly and impartially conſider this: let us examine our own hearts and lives. We all ſuffer: and we have *all* ſinned. But will it not be moſt profitable for us, to conſider every one his own ſins, as bringing ſufferings both on himſelf and others: to ſay, *Lo, I have ſinned, I have done wickedly: but theſe ſheep, what have they done?*

I. 1. Let us enquire, Firſt, What they ſuffer? And, afterwards, what is the Cauſe of theſe ſufferings? That the people ſuffer, none can deny:—that they are afflicted in a more than ordinary manner. Thouſands and tens of thouſands are at this day deeply afflicted thro' want of buſineſs. It is true, that this want is in ſome meaſure removed in ſome large and opulent towns. But it is alſo true, that this is far, very far from being the general caſe of the kingdom. Nothing is more ſure, than that thouſands of people in the Weſt of England, throughout Cornwall in particular, in the North, and even in the Midland counties, are totally unemployed.

Hence

Hence thoſe who formerly wanted nothing, are now in want of all things. They are ſo far from the plenty they once enjoyed, that they are in the moſt deplorable diſtreſs, deprived not only of the conveniences, but moſt of the neceſſaries of life. I have ſeen not a few of theſe wretched creatures, within little more than an hundred miles of London, ſtanding in the ſtreets, with pale looks, hollow eyes, and meagre limbs; or creeping up and down like walking ſhadows.—I have known families, who a few years ago, lived in an eaſy, genteel manner, reduced to juſt as much rayment as they had on, and as much food as they could gather in the field. To this one or

pther of them repaired once a day, to pick up the turnips which the cattle had left: which they boiled if they could get a few ſticks, or otherwiſe ate them raw. Such is the want of food to which many of our countrymen are at this day reduced by want of buſineſs.

2. Grievous enough is this calamity, which multitudes every day ſuffer. But I do not know whether many more do not labour under a ſtill more grievous calamity. It is a great affliction to be deprived of bread: but it is a ſtill greater, to be deprived of our ſenſes. And this is the caſe with thouſands upon thouſands of our countrymen at this day. Wide-ſpread poverty (tho' not in ſo high

high a degree) I have ſeen ſeveral years ago. But ſo wide-ſpread a lunacy I never ſaw, nor I believe the oldeſt man alive. Thouſands of plain, honeſt people throughout the land are driven utterly out of their ſenſes, by means of the poiſon which is ſo diligently ſpread, thro' every city and town in the kingdom. They are ſcreaming out for Liberty, while they have it in their hands, while they actually poſſeſs it: and to ſo great an extent, that the like is not known in any other nation under heaven: whether we mean Civil Liberty, a liberty of enjoying all our legal property, or religious Liberty, a liberty of worſhipping God according to the dictates of our own conſcience

ſcience. Therefore all thoſe who are either paſſionately or dolefully crying out "Bondage! Slavery!" while there is no more danger of any ſuch thing, than there is of the ſky falling upon their head, are utterly diſtracted; their reaſon is gone; their intellects are quite confounded. Indeed many of theſe have lately recovered their ſenſes: yet are there multitudes ſtill remaining, who are in this reſpect as perfectly mad as any of the inhabitants of Bedlam.

3. Let not any one think, this is but a ſmall calamity which is fallen upon our land. If you ſaw, as I have ſeen, in every county, city, town, men who were once of a calm, mild, friendly temper, mad with party-

zeal,

zeal, foaming with rage againſt their quiet neighbors, ready to tear out one another's throats, and to plunge their ſwords into each other's bowels: —if you had heard men, who once feared God and honoured the king, now breathing out the bittereſt invectives againſt him, and juſt ripe, ſhould any occaſion offer, for treaſon and rebellion; you would not then judge this to be a little evil, a matter of ſmall moment; but one of the heavieſt judgments which God can permit to fall upon a guilty land.

4. Such is the condition of Engliſhmen at home. And is it any better abroad? I fear not. From thoſe who are now upon the ſpot I learn, that in our Colonies alſo, many are

cauſing

cauſing the people to drink largely of the ſame deadly wine; thouſands of whom are thereby inflamed more and more, till their heads are utterly turned, and they are mad to all intents and purpoſes. Reaſon is loſt in rage; it's ſmall ſtill voice is drowned by popular clamour. Wiſdom is fallen in the ſtreets. And where is the place of underſtanding? It is hardly to be found in theſe Provinces. Here is *ſlavery*, real Slavery indeed, moſt properly ſo called. For the regular, legal, conſtitutional form of government is no more. Here is real, not imaginary bondage:—not the ſhadow of Engliſh Liberty is left. Not only no *liberty of the preſs* is allow'd: none

dare

dare print a page or a line, unleſs it be exactly conformable to the ſentiments of our lords, the people: but *no liberty of ſpeech.* Their *tongue is* not *their own.* None muſt dare to utter one word, either in favour of King GEORGE, or in disfavour of the idol they have ſet up; the new, illegal, unconſtitutional Government, utterly unknown to us and to our forefathers. Here is no *religious liberty*; no liberty of conſcience, for them that *honour the King*, and whom conſequently a ſenſe of duty prompts them to defend, from the vile calumnies continually vented againſt him. Here is no *civil liberty*, no enjoying the fruit of their labour, any further than the populace pleaſes.

A man has no ſecurity for his trade, his houſe, his property, unleſs he will ſwim with the ſtream. Nay, he has no ſecurity for his life, if his popular neighbour has a mind to cut his throat. For there is no Law; and no legal magiſtrate to take cognizance of offences. There is the gulph of tyranny,—of arbitrary power on one hand, and of anarchy on the other. And, as if all this were not miſery enough, See likewiſe the fell monſter War! But who can deſcribe the complicated miſery which is contained in this? Hark! The cannons roar! A pitchy cloud covers the face of the ſky. Noiſe, confuſion, terror, reign over all! Dying groans are on every ſide. The

bodies

bodies of men are pierced, torn, hewed in pieces: their blood is poured on the earth like water! Their ſouls take their flight into the eternal world: perhaps into everlaſting miſery. The miniſters of grace turn away from the horrid ſcene; the miniſters of vengeance triumph. Such already has been the face of things in that once happy land, where peace and plenty, even while baniſhed from great part of Europe, ſmiled for near an hundred years.

5. And what is it which drags on theſe poor victims into the field of blood?—It is a great phantom, which ſtalks before them, which they are taught to call, *Liberty!* It is this

Which breathes "into their hearts
ſtern love of war,
And thirſt of vengeance, and con-
tempt of death."

Real Liberty, meantime, is trampled underfoot, and is loſt in anarchy and confuſion.

6. But which of theſe warriors all the while conſidered the wife of his youth, that is now left a diſconſolate widow—perhaps with none that careth for her: perhaps, deprived of her only comfort and ſupport, and not having where to lay her head? Who conſidered his helpleſs children, now deſolate orphans; it may be, crying for bread: while their mother has nothing left to give them, but her ſorrows and her tears?

II.

II. 1. And yet *these sheep, what have they done*, altho' all this is come upon them? *Suppose ye that* they are *sinners above other men, because they suffer such things? I tell you nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* It therefore behoves us to consider our own sins;—the cause of all our sufferings. It behoves each of us to say, *Lo I have sinned: I have done wickedly.*

2. The time would fail, should I attempt to enumerate all the ways wherein we have sinned: but in general, this is certain,

"The rich, the poor, the high, the low,
Have wander'd from his mild command;

"The

The floods of wickedneſs o'erflow,
And deluge all the guilty land:
People and prieſt lie drown'd in ſin,
And Tophet yawns to take them in."

How innumerable are the violations of Juſtice among us? Who does not adopt the old maxim,

Si poſſis, rectè; ſi non, quocunque modo rem.

"If you can get money honeſtly, do: but however, get money."

Where is Mercy to be found, if it would ſtand in oppoſition to Intereſt? How few will ſcruple, for a valuable conſideration, to oppreſs the widow or fatherleſs? And where ſhall we find Truth? Deceit and fraud go not out of our ſtreets. Who is it that ſpeaks

the

the truth from his heart? whoſe words are the picture of his thoughts? Where is he that has *put away all lying*, that never ſpeaks what he does not mean? Who is aſhamed of this? Indeed it was once ſaid, and even by a ſtateſman, "All other vices have had their patrons: but Lying is ſo baſe, ſo abominable a vice, that never was any one found yet, who dared openly to plead for it. Would one imagine this writer lived in a court? Yea, and that in the preſent century? Did not he himſelf then, as well as all his brother-ſtateſmen, plead for a trade of deliberate lying? Did he not plead for the innocence, yea and the neceſſity, of employing *ſpies*? The vileſt race of liars under

the

the ſun? Yet who ever ſcrupled uſing them, but Lord *Clarendon*?

3. O Truth, whither art thou fled? How few have any acquaintance with thee? Do not we continually tell lies for the nonce, without gaining thereby either profit or pleaſure? Is not even our common language replete with falſhood? Above an hundred years ago the Poet complained,

"It never was good day
Since lowly fawning was called compliment."

What would he have ſaid, had he lived a century later, when that art was brought to perfection?

4. Perhaps there is one palpable evidence of this, which is not uſu-

ally

ally attended to. If you blame a man in many other reſpects, he is not much affronted. But if you ſay, "He is a liar," he will not bear it, he takes fire at once. Why is this? Becauſe a man can bear to be blamed, when he is conſcious of his own innocence. But if you ſay, He is a liar, you touch a ſore ſpot: he is guilty, and therefore cannot bear it.

5. Is there a character more deſpicable than even that of a liar?—Perhaps there is: even that of an Epicure. And are we not a generation of Epicures? Is not our *belly* our *god*? Are not eating and drinking our chief delight, our higheſt happineſs? Is it not the main ſtudy

(I fear, the only ſtudy) of many honourable men, to inlarge the pleaſure of taſting? When was luxury (not in food only, but in dreſs, furniture, equipage) carried to ſuch an height in *Great-Britain*, ever ſince it was a nation? We have lately extended the *Britiſh* empire, almoſt over the globe. We have carried our lawrels into *Africa*, into *Aſia*, into the burning and the frozen climes of *America*. And what have we brought thence? All the elegance of vice, which either the Eaſtern or Weſtern world could afford.

6. Luxury is conſtantly the parent of Sloth. Every glutton will in due time be a drone. The more of meat and drink he devours, the leſs taſte will

will he have for labour. This degeneracy of the Britons from their temperate, active forefathers, was taken notice of in the laſt century. But if Mr. *Herbert* then ſaid,

"O England, full of ſin, but moſt of ſloth,"

what would he have ſaid now? Obſerve the difference between the laſt and the preſent century, only in a ſingle inſtance. In the laſt, the Parliament uſed to meet *Horâ quintâ ante meridiem!* at five in the morning. Could theſe Britons look out of their graves, what would they think of the preſent generation?

7. Permit me to touch on one article more, wherein indeed we excel all the nations upon earth. Not

one

one nation under the canopy of heaven can vie with the *English* in Profaneness. Such a total neglect, such an utter contempt of God, is no where else to be found. In no other streets, except in Ireland, can you hear on every side,

"The horrid oath, the direful curse,
That latest weapon of the wretch's war,
And blasphemy, sad comrade of despair!"

8. Now let each of us lay his hand upon his heart and say, "Lord, Is it I? Have I added to this flood of unrighteousness and ungodliness, and thereby to the misery of my countrymen? Am not I guilty in any

any of the preceding reſpects? And do not *they* ſuffer becauſe *I* have ſinned?" If we have any tenderneſs of heart, any bowels of mercies, any ſympathy with the afflicted, let us purſue this thought, till we are deeply ſenſible of *our* ſins, as one great cauſe of *their* ſufferings.

9. But now the plague is begun, and has already made ſuch ravages both in *England* and *America*, what can *we* do, in order that it may be ſtayed? How ſhall we ſtand between the living and the dead? Is there any better way to turn aſide the anger of God, than that preſcribed by St. James, *Purge your hands, ye ſinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded?* Firſt, *Purge your hands.*

Imme-

Immediately put away the evil of your doings. Inſtantly flee from ſin, from every evil word and work, as from the face of a ſerpent. *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth*, no uncharitable, no unprofitable converſation. Let no guile be found in your mouth: ſpeak to every man the truth from your heart. Renounce every way of acting, however gainful, which is contrary either to juſtice or mercy. Do to every one as, in parallel circumſtances, you would wiſh he ſhould do unto you. Be ſober, temperate, active; and in every word and work, labour to have a conſcience void of offence toward God and toward man. Next, thro' the almighty grace of Him that

loved

loved you, and gave himſelf for you, *purify your hearts by faith.* Be no longer double-minded, halting between earth and heaven, ſtriving to ſerve God and mammon. Purify your hearts from pride: humbling yourſelves under the mighty hand of God:—from all party-zeal, anger, reſentment, bitterneſs, which now eſpecially, will eaſily beſet you:—from all prejudice, bigotry, narrowneſs of ſpirit:—from impetuoſity, and impatience of contradiction:—from love of diſpute, and from every degree of an unmerciful or implacable temper. Inſtead of this *earthly, deviliſh wiſdom*, let *the wiſdom from above* ſink deep into your hearts: that *wiſdom* which *is firſt pure*, then *peaceable, eaſy to be intreated*, convinced,

vinced, perſuaded, or appeaſed, *full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality*, embracing all men; *without hypocriſy*, genuine and unfeigned. Now, if ever, *putting away with all malice, all clamour*, railing, *and evil-ſpeaking: be ye kind one to another*; to all your brethren and countrymen; *tender-hearted* to all that are in diſtreſs, *forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven you.*

10. And *now let my counſel be acceptable to* you, to every one of you preſent before God. *Break off thy ſins by repentance, and thy iniquities by ſhewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility*; of what degree of it ſtill remains among us. Shew mercy more eſpecially to

the

the poor widows, to the helpleſs orphans of your countrymen, who are now numbered among the dead, who fell among the ſlain in a diſtant land. Who knoweth but the Lord will yet be intreated, will calm the madneſs of the people, will quench the flames of contention, and breathe into all the ſpirit of love, unity and concord. Then brother ſhall not lift up ſword againſt brother, neither ſhall they know war any more. Then ſhall plenty and peace flouriſh in our land, and all the inhabitants of it be thankful for the innumerable bleſſings which they enjoy, and ſhall *fear God, and honour the King.*

LONDON, Nov. 7. 1775.

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